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Commander Zero Writes in Own Defense

A self-described "assiduous reader" of our columns has written to tell us more about himself and to correct what he says were errors in a story we wrote about him in July.

He is Eden Pastora, the famous "Commander Zero" of the Nicaraguan revolution and now the fiercely independent leader of anti-Sandinista guerrillas operating along the Costa Rican border. Because Pastora could conceivably succeed in his quixotic mission to drive out his Marxist ex-colleagues in Managua, his letter deserves attention.

Pastora erroneously attributed to us "a desire to hurt me" because we reported the doubts of our intelligence sources concerning what he would do if he ever gained power in Managua.

"I am a democrat, a revolutionary and a nationalist," Pastora wrote. "I have fought in armed combat against both extremes, against those who perhaps have led you to denigrate me.

"In response to your statement that no one can be sure where I would lead my country were I to come to power, I point to my fight against the Somoza dictatorship, often risking my life, and to my current war against the dictatorship of the nine communist commanders of Nicaragua, again risking my life and clearly demonstrating in what direction I want my homeland to go.

"I do not want for Nicaragua either the dictatorship of the right or the dictatorship of the left, nor do I want primitive capitalist exploiters or communist totalitarians. I want neither the

exploitation of man by man nor the exploitation of man by the state.

"I want for my people a free society, with peaceful development, with authentic participation by the people in national decisions, with an effective political pluralism, under the banners of national dignity and nationalism—the true banners of Gen. Sandino, who today is falsified and reviled by the communists of Managua."

In his letter, Pastora addressed what he said were errors in our report. His mother, he said, was Nicaraguan, not Costa Rican, and it was she, not the Sandinista underground, who "with much sacrifice" sent him to study outside the country. And he studied in Mexico, not in Cuba or the Soviet Union.

As for our report on "a curious incident" involving the young Pastora and \$80,000 intended for Cuban President Fidel Castro in 1963, Pastora denied any relationship with Castro before 1978. He also said he never received training from Castro, "since I already had—and I say this with justified and patriotic pride—magnificent training in the school of guerrilla life as practiced in the Segovian jungles of northern Nicaragua."

Pastora closes with this appeal:

"Finally, I wish to beg you to help us spread the truth about the thousands of our guerrillas who are fighting barefoot and hungry. We fight in the south and east of Nicaragua, and if necessary we will die to see our homeland free of all dictatorship, of all repression, and where wave only the banners of dignity, liberty and national independence."